

On leaving your day job behind

Portrait photographer Amanda Claire Murphy discusses leaving a stable job to pursue her art full-time, the role art plays in saving what we'll lose, and what dreaming (really) big can do for an artist.

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As told to Isa Adney, 1561 words.

Tags: [Photography](#), [Money](#), [Day jobs](#), [Beginnings](#).

How did you know it was time to leave your day job as a photographer at the library and go all in on your creative work?

I just felt it. I used to feel very fulfilled at the library, where I worked as a full-time photographer, but then I was waking up and dreading going in. I felt like I wasn't giving 100 percent and instead looking forward to doing more things on my own. But I wasn't doing anything to leave my job because I was so scared. But then I just thought, "What do I really want to show for my life?" That's what pushed me forward. Because for a long time I was happy and content at my job. But then I felt like, "I've done everything here. What can my next thing be?" It was after I won employee of the year. I was like, "I can't be here anymore. I can't keep doing the same thing over and over and over again." When I was, I don't know, 15, 16, I thought I'd never do creative photography as my full time job. I thought, have to have a "real job." That was a mindset I had for a long time. And then it was like, "No, but you can. You can do this."



What ultimately helped you decide to take that leap and get past that very understandable resistance towards making such a big life change?

It's been years and years of me doing this on the side, on the weekends, and being drained from that and getting frustrated that I couldn't put a hundred percent in either of them. I guess I thought it would just come to me and I'd be like, "Okay, now it's time." But I just had to push myself. And turning 30 was a big milestone; like, I'm going to be 30 now-what's next? I do have one memory: I was just vacuuming, and I thought, "What if I quit over the summer?"

I had also just done the [\[Colorpop\]](#) Workshop and that was a big eye opening thing. I went to Utah with this group of women from around the world. We did stylized shoots, but we also got to talk to each other. And hearing from other women who were able to do this full time was inspiring as well. That gave me the final push to be like, "Okay, I can't go back to the library after doing this workshop and being this creative."

Why do you think teenage you didn't think being a full-time professional photographer was possible?

At the time I couldn't understand what avenues there were in photography, and I thought it was just taking pictures for newspapers or magazines. I couldn't understand there was a whole world, and I'm still learning all the ways people use photography and [might] need my services. I think I kind of halted a little bit right out of college. I got an internship at the library and was there for eight years. So I feel now very much like I'm going back to before-college Amanda, high-school Amanda, where what I did for fun was just take pictures and edit them on and put them on Flickr and Tumblr.

What does it feel like now to be a full-time freelance photographer compared to being a photographer for an organization?

It's a lot harder. I realized early on I'm really going to have to work for this now, instead of just showing up to an office every day. I was very good at the library and it was [relatively] easy in comparison. And it was nice to have someone to report to, and I do miss being on a team. I miss my coworkers. So that's what I've been trying to do this year, find more community in Orlando.

I've been doing this for over 10 years officially, since the very first person paid me for pictures in 2012, but I still feel like it's only been like six months of "Okay let me try to do this for real."



One of my favorite things is seeing how you play with the self-timer setting in your garage. What is your process for playing and experimenting with your art?

I have been taking pictures of myself for years. My sister's a lot younger than me so I couldn't really use her as a model, so I relied on myself. I spent a lot of time in my room with my camera. And that's the best and easiest and best way I know how. I wish I was a painter. I wish I could draw. I cannot, I'm not artistic in that way, but my form of self expression is my self portraits. But I kind of abandoned that for a little while and it's been fun to get back.

And I love how confident you feel right after you create something. I always feel so much better about myself. Creating for myself is a learning opportunity as well. If it's something I want to try on a client, I'm like, let me try it out on myself first.

From the outside, it also seems like you're accessing this sense of play and creativity in your self-portraits that inspire me. Where does that sense of play come from for you?

Other photographers and other photos I see inspire me. I've always been like that from Tumblr, just seeing other photos and thinking, "I want to do something like that," and of course make it my own. Listening to music also inspires me. I feel like your music choices can manifest in the art you create.

When you're not shooting for a client or shooting self portraits in your garage, what are you typically drawn to capture and why?

I love architecture a lot. I definitely love trying to make art out of the abstract architect pieces and look at it in a different way. And when going for a walk [I'm] drawn to the way the sun sets, the grass and the water and the trees at the lake. And flowers. I love flowers.



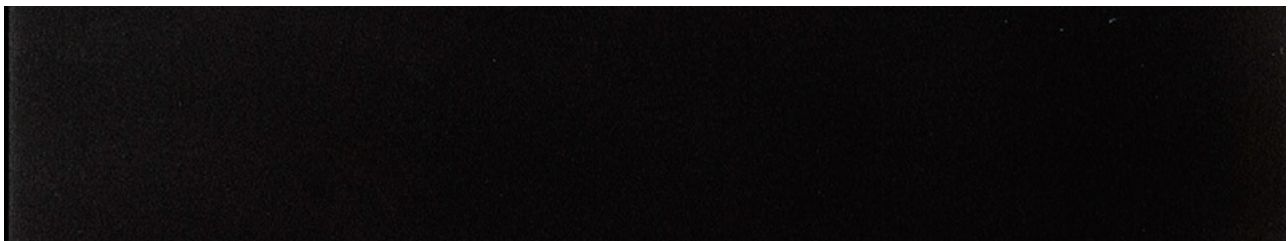


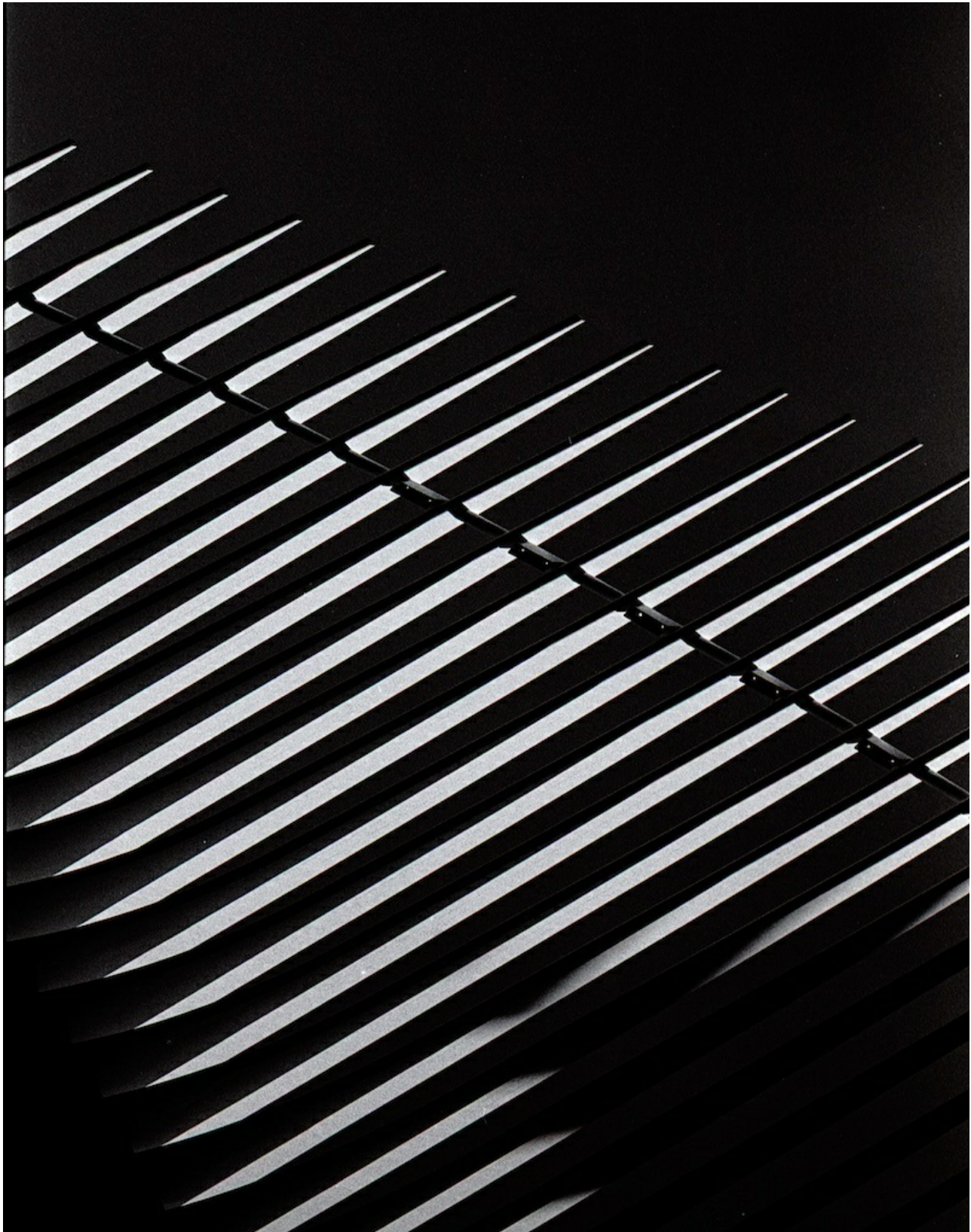
Why do you think you're drawn to these things in particular?

I don't know how to make it not sound cheesy like capturing a moment in time, but it is about capturing something, capturing the way you see it and creating something new. It's a moment in time and it'll never be like that again. The next day it's not going to look like that anymore.

Even thinking about flowers, you're capturing something that really won't be exactly like that tomorrow. There will be other flowers, sure. But that flower, at that moment, will change tomorrow. That hits me differently in my late thirties, and with these recent horrific LA fires; this idea of how ephemeral things are. How temporary.

Yes, and that idea of what's lost is a huge part of my life. I love going down memory lane. I love looking at old photos. There's been so many times I've regretted not bringing my camera or thought I should have taken that photo. Because it'll never look like that again. I'll never look like this again.





I love how vocal you have been about having a big dream to photograph Ariana Grande one day. You said that to me the first time we met, and I was so delighted because as I told you then I've always had a big dream to profile Taylor Swift. I don't meet a lot of people who say big dreams like that out loud. What does dreaming big as an

artist do for you?

We'll see if it ever happens, but when I was younger I didn't really have a lot of goals. I didn't really know what I wanted to do for a while. But I learned a lesson back in college where I was like, I really want to study abroad. And then I ended up finding some information about how my community college actually had study abroad programs. I'm like 19 and for the first time I realized, "Oh if I want to do something and want to be inspired by something, I can do it."

And I think having a goal that's not too crazy is important as well, but a big goal kind of pushes you and inspires you. I would love to photograph Ariana Grande. I love her as a model and her brand, her essence, her style. And looking at all her pictures and seeing what other photographers do, I just get this feeling like, "I can do that." Because I think the worst thing that I do and that people can do is [say] "I can't; I could never do that; that's so far out of my reach."

Amanda Claire Murphy recommends:

Future Funk mixes on Youtube

Printing your work

Taking a walk in the morning

Traveling by yourself

Falling asleep without your phone

Name

Amanda Claire Murphy

Vocation

photographer

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